

Minister Katrougkalos explores Eurofound data on trust and social tensions

Levels of trust and social tension in society, particularly between people of different socio-economic situations and backgrounds, were high on the agenda during the visit of George Katrougkalos, Greek Minister of State for European Affairs, to Eurofound in Dublin on Thursday 5 April. In recent years people in a number of European countries have reported declining levels of trust, both in relation to institutions and broader society. There has also been increases in perceived levels of inequality in a number of Member States.

Eurofound's European Quality of Life Survey 2016 provided a good background for the discussions, allowing for comparisons between people in Greece and other Member States in the European Union. Convergence in the European Union was another issue which was emphasised during the visit. The European Union is committed to economic, social and territorial cohesion, balanced economic growth and upward economic convergence. Focusing on convergence of outcomes and performances of Member States and regions, Eurofound monitors convergence among Member States relating to socioeconomic factors, employment, working conditions and living conditions.

Minister Katrougkalos met with Juan Menendez-Valdés, Director of Eurofound, Stavroula Demetriades, Senior Research Manager, and Mary McCaughey, Eurofound's Head of Information and Communication. Minister Katrougkalos was accompanied by Ms Katia Georgiou, Greek Ambassador to Ireland, Ms Maria Lentoudi, Minister's Adviser, and Avgi Katrougkalou.

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Commission takes further action to better protect workers against cancer-causing chemicals

Today, the European Commission is taking another important step to protect workers in the European Union from workplace-related cancer as well as other health problems. The Commission proposes to limit workers' exposure to five cancer-causing chemicals, in addition to the 21 substances that have already been limited or proposed to be limited since the beginning of this mandate. Estimates show that today's proposal would improve working conditions for over 1,000,000 EU workers and prevent over 22,000 cases of work-related illness. Commissioner for Employment, Social Affairs, Skills and Labour Mobility, Marianne **Thyssen**, said: *"Today, the Commission has taken another important step towards fighting work-related cancer and other relevant health*

problems on the work floor. We propose to limit workers' exposure to five additional cancer-causing chemicals. This will improve protection for over 1 million workers in Europe and help create a healthier and safer workplace, which is a core principle of the European Pillar of Social Rights." The proposal is based on scientific evidence and follows broad discussions with relevant stakeholders, in particular employers, workers and Member States' representatives. More information can be found in this [press release](#) and [memo](#) online. (For more information: Christian Wigand – Tel.: +32 229 62253; Sara Soumillion – Tel.: + 32 229 67094)

Horizon 2020 to provide over €12 million in support for SMEs to bring their innovations faster to the market

Horizon 2020, the EU research and innovation programme, will support 257 small and medium-sized companies (SMEs) from 31 countries with €12.65 million of funding under the [SME instrument](#). Each SME will receive €50,000 to prepare feasibility assessment plans, known as phase 1 of the SME instrument. The companies will also receive [coaching and business acceleration services](#). Examples of selected projects among the 257 chosen are solar street lights, a diagnosis tool for sleep apnoea, an innovative mobile payment technology and a wrapping machine for sustainable packaging. Most of the SMEs work in the field of health, engineering and information and communication technology. Under the SME instrument, which is part of the [European Innovation Council pilot](#), companies can apply for two distinct non-related phases, depending on the maturity of their innovation. In phase 1 each project receives €50,000 to carry out a feasibility study and, if selected, in phase 2 each project can receive up to €2.5 million to finance innovation activities. The next application deadline for phase 1 is in May 2018. More information including the list of beneficiaries can be found in this [news item](#). (For more information: Ricardo Cardoso – Tel.: +32 229 80100; Victoria von Hammerstein – Tel.: +32 229 55040; Maud Noyon – Tel. +32 229-80379)

Commission publishes a new agricultural production forecast

The Commission published today a report presenting a [short-term agricultural markets' outlook](#). The report also highlights the recovery of EU cereal production, increasing by 10mt from 2016 to 2017, and an expected increase in oilseed production, led by rapeseed marking a 9% increase compared to 2016/17. For the dairy sector, sustained demand for dairy products will be matched with a growth in milk production from 165.1mt in 2017 to 167.1mt in 2018. As far as the meat sector is concerned, EU beef exports, after a sustained increase in the last few years, will stabilise at a record high level with 0.24mt of live animals and 0.28mt of meat exports in 2018, while production is expected to slightly decrease. Sheep meat production and exports are expected to stabilise in 2018. As for the poultry sector, production and trade are expected this year to recover from the effects of 2017 bird flu. The EU sugar production is on rise. The 2017/18 levels are estimated to be 20% above the average of previous years. The full in-depth

analysis is available [here](#). (For more information: Daniel Rosario – Tel.: +32 229 56185; Kinga Malinowska – Tel: +32 229 51383)

Mergers: Commission clears acquisition of Italo by Global Infrastructure Management

The European Commission has approved, under the EU Merger Regulation, the acquisition of Italo – Nuovo Trasporto Viaggiatori S.p.A. (“Italo”) of Italy by Global Infrastructure Management, LLC of the US. Italo is Italy’s first privately-owned high-speed rail passenger transport operator, connecting 19 stations in 14 Italian cities. Global Infrastructure Management is a US-based global infrastructure investor in the energy, transport and water and waste sectors. The Commission concluded that the proposed acquisition would raise no competition concerns because the companies are not active in the same market or in vertically related markets. The transaction was examined under the simplified merger review procedure. More information is available on the Commission’s [competition](#) website, in the public [case register](#) under the case number [M.8839](#). (For more information: Ricardo Cardoso – Tel.: +32 229 80100; Maria Sarantopoulou – Tel.: +32 229 13740)

EU report: Moldova advances in reform implementation but considerably more progress is needed

[The Republic of Moldova](#) has managed to stabilise its economic situation and, with constant but conditional support from the European Union and other international partners, has progressed with the implementation of some reforms, for example in the business and financial sectors, however, further efforts by the Moldovan authorities are required, in particular to address high level corruption, the one billion dollar banking fraud, reform the judicial system and ensure inclusiveness in the electoral process. These are among the conclusions presented today in a [Joint Report](#) by the European External Action Service and the European Commission on the implementation of Moldova’s commitments under the [EU-Moldova](#) Association Agreement since the last meeting of the [EU-Moldova Association Council](#). “We have a comprehensive agenda with the Republic of Moldova”, said the High Representative/Vice-President, Federica **Mogherini**. “Some reforms have recently advanced [...] and further progress is needed in other areas, notably the fight against corruption and reforming the judiciary. Our support to the people of Moldova is clear and we expect satisfactory reform progress by the authorities, which would bring tangible benefits for Moldovan citizens.” Commissioner for European Neighbourhood Policy and Enlargement Negotiations, Johannes **Hahn** added: “The EU is Moldova’s main trading partner [...]. Since the Association Agreement including the DCFTA entered into force, the EU’s share in Moldova’s exports has increased and accounts now for more than half of Moldova’s total trade. [...] To fully reap the rewards of our Association Agreement, Moldova needs to keep on implementing further reforms, without delay.” The report was published ahead of the next EU-Moldova Association Council, which is scheduled to take place on 3 May 2018 in Brussels. A full

[press release](#) is available online. For more information see the [Joint Report](#), [factsheet](#) and [website](#) of the EU Delegation. (For more information: Maja Kocijančič – Tel.: +32 229 86570; Adam Kaznowski – Tel.: +32 229 89359; Alceo Smerilli – Tel.: +32 229 64887)

Eurostat: Le volume des ventes du commerce de détail en hausse de 0,1% dans la zone euro

En février 2018 par rapport à janvier 2018, le volume des ventes du commerce de détail corrigé des variations saisonnières a augmenté de 0,1% dans la zone euro (ZE19) et de 0,2% dans l'UE28, selon les estimations d'Eurostat, l'office statistique de l'Union européenne. En janvier 2018, le commerce de détail avait reculé de 0,3% dans la zone euro et était demeuré stable dans l'UE28. Vous pouvez trouver le communiqué de presse [ici](#). (Pour plus d'informations: Lucía Caudet – Tél.: +32 229 56182; Maud Noyon – Tél.: +32 229-80379; Victoria von Hammerstein – Tél.: +32 229 55040)

Les prix à la production industrielle en hausse de 0,1% dans la zone euro

En février 2018 par rapport à janvier 2018, les prix à la production industrielle ont augmenté de 0,1% dans la zone euro (ZE19) et sont restés stables dans l'UE28, selon les estimations d'Eurostat, l'office statistique de l'Union européenne. En janvier 2018, les prix avaient augmenté de 0,4% dans la zone euro ainsi que dans l'UE28. En février 2018 par rapport à février 2017, les prix à la production industrielle ont progressé de 1,6% dans la zone euro et de 1,8% dans l'UE28. Vous pouvez trouver le communiqué de presse [ici](#). (Pour plus d'informations: Lucía Caudet – Tél.: +32 229 56182; Maud Noyon – Tél.: +32 229-80379; Victoria von Hammerstein – Tél.: +32 229 55040)

ANNOUNCEMENTS

Commissioner Stylianides visits Portugal

Today, Commissioner for Humanitarian Aid and Crisis Management Christos **Stylianides** is in Lisbon, Portugal to attend the International Conference on Higher Education in Emergencies 'Doing More, Better And Faster'. The conference focusses on the provision of higher education in emergencies and opportunities for refugees in vulnerable situations, affected by conflicts or natural disasters. Since the Juncker Commission took office, it has consistently increased the amount of humanitarian aid dedicated to education in emergencies. From only 1% in 2015, the EU dedicated 6% of its annual humanitarian aid budget in 2017 to education in emergencies, one of the most underfunded sectors of humanitarian aid. In 2018, this amount will increase to 8% with an EU contribution of over €86 million. Some 5 million girls and boys in 52 countries around the world have benefited from EU funding between 2012 and 2017. (For more information: Carlos Martin Ruiz de Gordejuela – Tel.: +32 229 65322; Daniel Puglisi – Tel.: +32 229 69140)

Commissioner Vestager visits Copenhagen and participates in a Citizens' Dialogue

Commissioner for Competition, Margrethe **Vestager** travels to Denmark today and will participate in a Citizens' Dialogue on the future of Europe, the EU's competition policy and other issues at the top of the EU's agenda. The Citizens' Dialogue will take place at Gorrissen Federspiel Advokatpartnerselskab and will start at 16:30 CEST. More information is available [online](#). (For more information: Ricardo Cardoso – Tel.: +32 229 80100; Maria Sarantopoulou – Tel.: +32 229 13740)

Vice-President Katainen in Milan

Vice-President Jyrki Katainen, responsible for Jobs, Growth, Investment and Competitiveness, travels to Milan and Cernobbio, Italy, on Friday 6 and Saturday 7 April. He will discuss jobs and growth with students from Milan's universities at the [Citizens' Dialogue](#) at the Bocconi University. The event will be livestreamed from 11.30 CET onwards. Vice-President Katainen will participate in a working lunch with representatives of European [Creative and Cultural Industries](#) and he will meet the Mayor of Milan, Mr. Giuseppe Sala. Furthermore, he will attend the European House [Ambrosetti Finance Workshop](#) "The Outlook for the Economy and Finance" in Cernobbio, where he will deliver a keynote speech on the future of European Industry on Saturday 7 April. (For more information: Christian Spahr – Tel.: +32 229 50055; Annikky Lamp – Tel.: +32 229 56151; Enda MacNamara – Tel.: +32 229 64976)

[Upcoming events](#) of the European Commission (ex-Top News)

[Commission follows up on workers' protection from cancer-causing chemicals](#)

How are workers currently protected against cancer-causing chemicals under EU legislation?

The EU principles of worker protection from carcinogens are laid out in the over-arching [Occupational Safety and Health \(OSH\) Framework Directive 89/391/EEC](#) and those Directives specifically dealing with chemical risks – notably the [Chemical Agents Directive](#) (CAD) and the [Carcinogens and Mutagens Directive](#) (CMD).

Under the OSH framework, risks to the safety and health of workers must be eliminated, or, if total elimination is not possible, reduced to a minimum. Employers must identify and assess risks to workers associated with exposure to specific carcinogens and mutagens at the workplace, and must prevent

exposure where risks occur. Where this is technically possible, substitution with a non- or less-hazardous process or chemical agent is required. In cases where such substitution is not possible, chemical carcinogens must, as far as it is technically possible, be manufactured and used in a closed system to prevent workers' exposure. Where this is not possible either, worker exposure must be reduced to as low a level as is technically possible.

The Carcinogens and Mutagens Directive (CMD) sets a number of general provisions to prevent or reduce exposure for all carcinogens and mutagens falling under its scope. In addition to these general minimum requirements, the CMD indicates occupational exposure limit values (OELs) for all those carcinogens or mutagens for which this is possible, as an essential means to protect workers.

Reducing exposure to carcinogens and mutagens at the workplace by setting EU-wide OELs effectively contributes to the prevention of cancer cases, as well as other significant non-cancer health problems caused by these substances. Consequently it improves the quality of life and well-being of workers and their close ones, prolong working lives, contribute to better productivity and competitiveness of the EU, and improve the level playing field for businesses within the EU.

Scientific knowledge about carcinogenic chemicals is constantly evolving and technological progress enables improvements in protection of workers. To ensure that the mechanisms for protecting workers established in the CMD are as effective as possible and that up-to-date preventative measures are in place in all Member States, the Directive needs to be regularly revised. For this reason, the Commission has supported a continuous process of updating the CMD to keep abreast with the new scientific and technical developments, taking account of Social Partner's and Member State's views.

The current proposal is part of this continuous revision exercise, and is the third one since the start of this Commission. Two previous legislative amendments were proposed by the Commission, in May 2016 and [January 2017](#). Together they proposed limit values to 20 carcinogens. The first of these proposals was adopted by the co-legislators as [Directive \(EU\) 2017/2398](#).

What changes does the Commission propose to the Carcinogens and Mutagens Directive?

As part of this latest amendment to the CMD, five carcinogens of high relevance for the protection of workers have been selected:

- Cadmium and its inorganic compounds;
- Beryllium and inorganic beryllium compounds;
- Arsenic acid and its salts, as well as inorganic arsenic compounds;
- Formaldehyde;
- 4,4'-Methylene-bis(2-chloroaniline) (MOCA).

The first three carcinogens listed above are substance groups which comprise a large number of priority compounds. Clear support for establishing OELs for the substances subject to this initiative has been expressed by key

stakeholders during the two phases of the consultation of the social partners and in the opinions of the tripartite Advisory Committee on Safety and Health at Work (ACSH).

Table 1: Estimated exposed workforce, sectors concerned and health effects for the five carcinogens under consideration

Carcinogen	Estimated exposed workforce (number of workers)	Examples of sectors concerned	Health effects caused
Cadmium and its inorganic compounds	10 000 <i>Range of 2 900 – 300 000 between different estimates</i>	Cadmium production and refining, nickel-cadmium battery manufacture, cadmium pigment manufacture and formulation, cadmium alloy production, mechanical plating, zinc and copper smelting, mining of non-ferrous metal ores, brazing with a silver-cadmium-silver alloy solder, and polyvinylchloride compounding	Lung cancer, bladder, kidney and prostatic cancer Proteinurea, osteoporosis and respiratory effects
Beryllium and inorganic beryllium compounds	54 000 <i>Range of 14 000 – 74 000 between different estimates</i> <i>In addition: 7 000 – 41 000 workers potentially exposed in the construction sector</i>	Foundries, glass sector, laboratories	Lung cancer Chronic beryllium disease, allergy or asthma symptoms, beryllium respiratory sensitisation, skin sensitisation, cardiovascular, renal, hepatic and haematological effects
Arsenic acid and its salts, as well as inorganic arsenic compounds	7 900 – 15 300 <i>In addition: 18 000-102 000 potentially exposed below the lowest assessed OELs</i>	Copper and zinc production, glass, electronics and chemical sectors	Lung cancer, cancer in the skin, liver, lungs, bladder and kidney Peripheral neuropathy, cardiovascular effects and immunotoxicity, skin changes and blackfoot disease

Carcinogen	Estimated exposed workforce (number of workers)	Examples of sectors concerned	Health effects caused
Formaldehyde	990 000 <i>Range of 990 000 – 2 200 000 between different estimates</i>	Formaldehyde manufacturing, building and construction works, manufacturing of leather and fur, pulp, paper and paper products, textile and wood and wood products, pathology departments and autopsy rooms	Nasopharyngeal cancer, leukaemia, tumour induction Sensory irritation, potential cancer precursor effects
4,4'-Methylene-bis(2-chloroaniline) (MOCA)	350 <i>1 200 workers may potentially be indirectly exposed</i>	Plastics sector	Lung cancer, bladder cancer
Total workforce assessed: <i>Based on external study: RPA (2018)</i>	~ 1 070 000		

What are the benefits of the proposal for workers?

The proposal ensures the same minimum level of protection for all workers across the EU. Introducing these limit values will lead to fewer cases of work-related cancer. At the same time, carcinogenic and mutagenic substances can also cause other important health problems. For example, exposure to beryllium, in addition to lung cancer, also causes incurable chronic beryllium disease. Putting in place effective measures to prevent high exposures to the five substances and groups of substances under consideration would have a positive impact that would be much broader than cancer prevention alone.

Estimates show that this proposal would improve working conditions for over 1 million EU workers and prevent over 22,000 cases of work-related ill health in longer term. There are, however, a number of limitations that lead to an underestimation of the potential health benefits. These include the range of health effects of the substances, the existing availability of epidemiologic evidence, and the difficulties to predict future trends in exposures and production methods.

Assessing the monetary benefits of action against carcinogens and concomitant reduction in ill-health is also challenging. The greatest benefits of this proposal are expected in relation to formaldehyde. The quantified benefits for workers linked to the prevention of ill-health (nasopharyngeal cancer and sensory irritation only) are estimated to range between €1 billion to €5 billion.

What benefits will the proposal bring for businesses?

For businesses, the proposal will reduce costs caused by work-related ill-health and cancer in terms of absenteeism, lost expertise, insurance payments and productivity losses.

The existence of OELs provides clarity. They act as valuable benchmarks for employers enabling them to know exactly the levels above which exposure should not occur. OELs also allow employers to determine the level below which their risk management measures should aim to comply with the obligation to reduce the exposure to as low a level as is technically possible.

In addition, the proposal contributes to a more level playing field for businesses across the EU in the form of EU-wide minimum standards of protection. This is essential when striving for a deeper and fairer single market.

What benefits will the proposal bring for Member States?

For Member States, the proposal will contribute to avoid productivity losses and mitigate the financial costs of national social security systems, reducing the healthcare costs related to treatment and rehabilitation, and tax revenue losses due to morbidity and mortality.

The existence of EU-level OELs provides clarity regarding the acceptable levels of exposure and supports enforcement authorities in controlling that employers are putting in place the relevant risk management measures. In particular, OELs facilitate the work of inspectors by providing a helpful benchmark for compliance checks.

Furthermore, the existence of an EU OEL removes the need for national public authorities to independently evaluate each carcinogen to set their national OEL, preventing the inefficient repetition of identical tasks across Member States.

How have the social partners been consulted?

For this proposal, the Commission has conducted a two-stage consultation of the European Social Partners, first on the possible direction of European Union action concerning further revisions of the CMD, and secondly on its possible content. The social partners, workers' and employers' organisations, confirmed that the five carcinogens selected for the third amendment of the Directive are of high relevance for the protection of workers and encouraged the Commission to continue the work to establish EU OELs.

The Commission's preparatory work for the establishment of OELs took into account the input provided by the tripartite Advisory Committee on Safety and Health (ACSH), where workers', employers' organizations and Member States provided their opinion on the limit values proposed in the initiative.

For more info

[Press release](#)

EU report: the Republic of Moldova advances in reform implementation but considerably more progress is needed

The Republic of Moldova has managed to stabilise its economic situation and, with constant but conditional support from the European Union and other international partners, has progressed with the implementation of some reforms, including strengthening the Deep and Comprehensive Free Trade Area (DCFTA). Further efforts, however, are still needed in particular in order to address high level corruption, recover the misappropriated funds from the one billion dollar banking fraud and bring to justice those responsible for the fraud. A thorough reform of the judicial system is also to be addressed. The details are highlighted in a [joint report](#), released today by the European External Action Service and the European Commission.

EU High Representative for Foreign Affairs and Security Policy/Vice-President of the European Commission, Federica **Mogherini**, said: *"We have a comprehensive agenda with the Republic of Moldova, working to improve our economic links, increase trade and therefore bring jobs, to strengthen democracy, human rights and support for civil society and its important role in keeping the government and the political leadership accountable. Some reforms have recently advanced, in business and financial areas, for example, and further progress is needed in other areas, notably the fight against corruption and reforming the judiciary. Our support to the people of Moldova is clear and we expect satisfactory reform progress by the authorities, which would bring tangible benefits for Moldovan citizens."*

"The European Union is Moldova's main trading partner and over the past year trade between us has further increased," added Commissioner for European Neighbourhood Policy and Enlargement Negotiations, Johannes **Hahn**. *"Since the Association Agreement including the DCFTA entered into force, the EU's share in Moldova's exports has increased and accounts now for more than half of Moldova's total trade. The EU has helped to create over 1,500 jobs through support for the small businesses. This is just one of many examples showing why the EU matters to the Republic of Moldova and why our partnership is beneficial to the lives of its people. To fully reap the rewards of our Association Agreement, Moldova needs to keep on implementing further reforms, without delay."*

The joint report published today in line with the new approach to country reporting under the revised European Neighbourhood Policy (ENP), presents the implementation of the Republic of Moldova's commitments under the EU-Moldova Association Agreement since the last meeting of the [EU-Moldova Association Council on 31 March 2017](#), especially those included in the revised Association Agenda agreed in August 2017. It emphasises the close political dialogue between the two partners at all levels, enumerates examples of the new laws adopted in the period concerned as well as outlines the main challenges that need to be swiftly addressed by the Moldovan government.

The Republic of Moldova has also continued to reform its banking sector, supported by the EU and international partners such as the International Monetary Fund (IMF) and the World Bank. As a result, notably of these reforms, the IMF agreement is on track. The economic growth registered in 2016-2017 had a positive impact on trade. Moldova has made progress in aligning its legislation on trade matters to EU regulation and standards, but also here significant further efforts are required.

On democracy, human rights and good governance, the report recalls that the change of the electoral system in July 2017 went against the recommendation of the Council of Europe's Venice Commission and the Office for Democratic Institutions and Human Rights of the OSCE. The necessity to ensure inclusiveness in the electoral process ahead of the parliamentary elections in autumn is underlined. The report also stresses that corruption, including high level corruption, still remains widespread and the independence of justice, law enforcement as well as national anti-corruption authorities need substantial improvement.

A number of achievements, including examples of several projects that were completed in 2016-2017 with EU assistance and which directly improved citizens' daily lives, are highlighted. New business incubators have been established, for example in Calarasi, to boost economic development and create jobs, and the EU has provided grants to migrants returning to Moldova for business purposes. The importance of confidence-building measures and the concrete benefits they bring to Transnistria and Gagauzia, such as support for setting up businesses and creating jobs, are also underlined in the report.

The report was published ahead of the EU-Moldova Association Council which is scheduled to take place on 3 May 2018 in Brussels.

Background

The [European Neighbourhood Policy](#) (ENP) and its Review in November 2015 give the EU and its neighbours a clear political framework for the coming years with an overall objective of stabilisation. The principles of the [revised policy](#) are: enhanced differentiation between partners, a greater focus on objectives agreed with partners, increased flexibility to improve the EU's capacity to respond to crisis situations and a greater ownership by Member States and partner countries.

More information

[2018 Association Implementation Report on Moldova](#)

[EU-Moldova relations factsheet](#)

[Council Conclusions on the Republic of Moldova, 26 February 2018](#)

[Website of the EU Delegation to the Republic of Moldova](#)

[Press release: 2017 Eastern Partnership Summit – stronger together](#)

February 2018 compared with January 2018 Industrial producer prices up by 0.1% in euro area Stable prices in the EU28

In February 2018, compared with January 2018, industrial producer prices rose by 0.1% in the **euro area** (EA19) and remained stable in the **EU28**, according to estimates from **Eurostat, the statistical office of the European Union**. In January 2018, prices increased by 0.4% in both zones.

[Full text available on EUROSTAT website](#)